

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

US RUSSIA POLICY: TIME TO PUT
THE BRAKES ON DEMOCRATIC REFORM

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ABSTRACT

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Russia faces extreme challenges in its transformation to freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. This paper examines US policy toward Russia since that country undertook radical democratic reform. It then identifies the fundamental prerequisites for successful democratic reform as identified by political philosophers, and measures Russia's current situation against those factors. Next, it looks at historical examples of democratic reform and concludes that evolutionary reform, as effected in Poland and currently progressing in China, is preferable to revolutionary reform, as Russia is attempting. It concludes by proposing a new approach to US policy toward Russia, one of encouraging stability first, then the cultivation of a large middle class, and only then the implementation of full democratic reforms.

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US RUSSIA POLICY: TIME TO PUT THE BRAKES ON DEMOCRATIC REFORM

The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.

—President George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*

The year 1989 was truly a watershed year in world history. The year started with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Throughout the year, Anti-Soviet demonstrations gained momentum throughout Eastern Europe, culminating with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November. The year ended with a superpower summit in Malta, where Soviet Chairman Mikhail Gorbachev and President George H. W. Bush declared an end to the Cold War.¹ By the end of 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was officially dissolved. The arch-enemy of the United States was no more. In its place were 15 newly independent nations, including a federated, democratic Russian state led by President Boris Yeltsin. And as the iron curtain was lifted across Europe, 12 former Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe also became truly independent nations.

President Bush hailed the end of the US grand strategy of Soviet containment, and developed a new theme, that of a new world order, an era of cooperation between the once antagonistic superpowers.² In his State of the Union Address to Congress in 1990, he articulated the optimism of the day: “It’s time to build on our new relationship with the Soviet Union, to endorse and encourage a peaceful process of internal change toward democracy and economic opportunity.”³

But through the ensuing years, this initial optimism and encouragement gave way to rising antagonism and distrust between Washington and Moscow. Indeed, the current National Security Strategy of the United States codifies this distrust a matter of record:

Lingering distrust of our motives and policies by key Russian elites slows improvement in our relations. Russia’s uneven commitment to the basic values of free-market democracy and dubious record in combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remain matters of great concern. Russia’s very weakness limits the opportunities for cooperation.⁴

Although the National Security Strategy is committed to improving relations with Russia, US foreign policy has been insensitive to the Russian situation. In a remarkably short period of time, Russia has moved from a system of Soviet totalitarian government and Marxist economics to what our National Security Strategy describes as the “single sustainable model for national

success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”⁵ The tremendous challenges facing Russia today have been aggravated by the revolutionary pace of this reform. The United States has further aggravated these problems in many ways. This paper makes the argument that the United States should reassess its policies toward Russia, and toward reforming nations in general.

US/RUSSIA RELATIONS SINCE 1989

Several key events account for the deterioration in US/Russia relations since 1989. It is instructive to look at these events from both the American and Russian viewpoints.

MARGINALIZING RUSSIA IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The first real order of business in the post-Cold War world was German reunification. A main sticking point between the United States and Soviet Russia was NATO membership. Chairman Gorbachev initially insisted a reunited Germany must remain neutral, outside of the NATO alliance: “It means a historical enemy in a powerful rival alliance. It comes with no counterbalancing guarantees for our security.”⁶ Gorbachev was under tremendous pressure not to concede on this issue. In fact, all of Russia’s political factions—the communists, the nationalists, and the free-market reformers—were in agreement that NATO membership for Germany posed a threat to Russian security.⁷ In the West, however, the issue was looked at from quite another perspective. During the Cold War, Germany’s membership in NATO brought German military power into a subordinate relationship to NATO’s integrated military command structure, and solved the security dilemma that resulted in two World Wars.⁸ Continued NATO membership would allay the fears of Germany’s neighbors, most notably France,⁹ of a resurgent Germany with an independent military establishment dominating Europe.¹⁰ President George H. W. Bush, although willing to let the Germans themselves decide the issue, wanted Germany to remain in the western alliance.¹¹ In the end, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl pushed for retention of NATO membership. Gorbachev acquiesced, after Kohl agreed to several concessions to pacify the strong opposition in the Russian Duma. Among these concessions were: Germany would not obtain nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons; its armed forces would never exceed 370,000 troops; and Germany would finance East German debt to Russia.¹²

But unified Germany’s membership was just the first step in NATO enlargement. No longer trapped behind the iron curtain, the former Soviet satellites were eager to establish tight bonds with the West. Their eagerness was motivated largely by the belief that Russia could revert to totalitarian rule with hegemonic ambitions at any moment.¹³ Poland, Hungary,

Romania, Bulgaria, and others aggressively sought NATO membership. It also became clear that Russia would not be invited into the alliance. NATO enlargement over Russia's objections led Russians to believe that the West was marginalizing their interests, and was no longer trying to work out post-Cold War European security arrangements on a collaborative basis.¹⁴ Many in Russia viewed the West as striving to encircle and isolate them from the world community. George Kennan, the author of the US Cold War Grand Strategy of Soviet containment, called NATO expansion "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era."¹⁵ Gorbachev's chief political opposition severely criticized any NATO enlargement as a serious threat to Russian security.¹⁶ NATO attempted to mitigate Russia's fears through the Founding Act, which gave Russia a consultative role in NATO. Personifying what Russians perceived as an anti-Russian bias in the West, former statesman Henry Kissinger severely criticized the Founding Act.¹⁷

During the Gulf War of 1991, although basically supportive of the actions proposed by the US-led coalition, the Soviet Russian leaders wanted a voice in the decision-making process, and were offended when this did not materialize. When informed, after the fact, that US troops were deploying to Saudi Arabia, an enraged Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze asked "Are you consulting us or are you informing us?"¹⁸

But the biggest offense taken by Russia over American marginalization of Russian interests came with NATO Operation ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo. Russians wanted to pursue more negotiations with their traditional Serbian allies, and saw the action as a threat to Russia itself, which has similar ethnic enclaves clamoring for independence. The United States and NATO acted without first taking the matter to the UN Security Council. Russia's reaction to the bombing of Serbia was severe. It pulled out of NATO military collaboration projects made possible by the Founding Act, delayed ratification of the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, and talked of restoring its strategic nuclear posture to provide a balance of power with a de facto hegemonic United States.¹⁹ "In the Russian view, the entire system of consultative mechanisms established for dialogue with the West since 1991 collapsed following the unilateral decision to launch Operation ALLIED FORCE."²⁰

And finally, Russia vehemently objected to US Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Russia's concerns were both economic and geo-political. Russia held \$8 billion in Iraqi debt, and Iraqi oil accounted for \$4 billion in Russian trade annually.²¹ Iraq was a critical source of oil for Russia, and in addition to obtaining it through the UN oil-for-food program, Russia had been violating the UN embargo to obtain it.²² President Putin voiced strong concern about the effect the war could

have on the stability of the Islamic regions of Russia and its bordering former Soviet republics, as well as America's disregard for Security Council opinion.²³

ECONOMIC PRESSURE AND THE IMF

Economic reform in Russia has been a very rocky road. Virtually all Russian industry was owned and run by the state. The Soviet state was essentially bankrupt after 70 years of mismanagement, and failed social and economic experimentation. The wreckage of the Soviet economy caused a debate about whether the West should implement a new "Marshall Plan" to provide economic stability as it did for Western Europe after World War II,^{24,25} but Kissinger and others argued against it.²⁶ Chairman Gorbachev acknowledged the dire state of the Soviet economy, and appealed for Western aid to implement his agenda of political, economic, and social reforms.²⁷ In the end, the West did not react to Chairman Gorbachev's appeal. According to Martin Walker, Editor-in-Chief of United Press International and that organization's former Moscow Bureau Chief, "The West's collective failure to do for its adversary in the Cold War what the United States alone achieved for Western Europe, Germany, and Japan after World War II is the greatest disappointment of the past decade."²⁸

Along with the pressure to go it alone without Western aid, the United States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pushed for fast privatization of huge enterprises such as the gas, oil, and telecommunications industries. However, without a regulatory agency such as the US government's Security and Exchange Commission (SEC), very few controls were placed on the Russian privatization process, and the result was bribery, corruption, and ultimately economic disaster. A small, corrupt class of oligarchs soon controlled nearly 50 percent of Russia's assets.²⁹ Mismanagement of investment and monetary reform led to 26-fold inflation in 1992; most Russians lost their life savings and the poverty level rose to 38 percent.³⁰ Lack of institutional economic buffers contributed to the Russian stock market crash of 1998, with stocks losing 90 percent of their value.³¹ By one account, 60 million Russians live in poverty today, versus 2 million in Soviet Russia, and male life expectancy has dropped from 65 to 57 years.³² Russia's GDP fell 40 percent between 1991 and 1998.³³ Many in Russia feel the blame lies primarily with the IMF, backed by US pressure to accelerate free-market reforms.³⁴ This opinion is also shared by at least one American analyst.³⁵ The Clinton administration, in its sixth year, started backing off of many of the economic reform demands, but by then many Russians believed the United States was behind the economic ruin of their country, and more than half of young Russians thought Western assistance was motivated by increasing Russia's dependence

on the West.³⁶ Recently, President George W. Bush renewed the harsh criticism of Russian economic reform and the attempts by President Putin to reel in the oligarchs.³⁷

INTERNAL SECURITY

The economic problems fanned the flames of organized crime. The mafia dominates Russian business and industry,³⁸ and Russians, already conditioned to distrust the excesses of capitalism, have become even more wary of free-market reform. In 1993, Russia's Chief Justice railed against the rapid economic reform, warning the country was fast turning into a mafia state.³⁹ Government and law enforcement officials were known for taking bribes.^{40,41} The government was so cash-strapped that it couldn't pay the Russian military, which started making threats.⁴² Russian soldiers could be found begging and stealing. Understandably, the readiness rate of the Russian military plummeted, and Russian national pride suffered through several embarrassing failures in military operations: the Kursk rescue during which the Russian military was incapable of doing anything yet too proud to ask for foreign assistance until it was too late;⁴³ the bloody insurrection in Chechnya; the botched rescue of hostages held in a Moscow theater by Chechnyan terrorists, during which Russian authorities used an ostensibly non-lethal gas which killed 117 hostages;⁴⁴ and finally the Beslan school terrorist incident where 405 out of 1220 hostages were killed in the crossfire between the terrorists and Russian authorities.⁴⁵

Russia considered the move against the Chechnyan insurrection an internal security issue and a needed anti-terrorist measure, and no business of anyone outside Russia. However, the US State Department and the European Union harshly criticized Russia's handling of the action, pushing for outside mediation and accusing Russia of excessive use of force.^{46,47}

In the wake of the Beslan horror, President Putin instituted a wide-range of measures to increase security, including strengthening anti-corruption laws and consolidating national security and anti-terrorism forces.⁴⁸ These measures were similar to those implemented by the United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September, 2001. President Putin also suspended popular election of the governors of Russia's recalcitrant autonomous republics. Instead he will now nominate them for approval by the local legislatures.⁴⁹ In the Russian view, the move was a necessary step to restore security in the long-term evolution of Russia's democratic reform.⁵⁰ But the Bush administration interpreted this action as a serious threat to democratic reform, and criticism came from both the State Department and President Bush himself.⁵¹

PREREQUISITES FOR FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY, AND FREE ENTERPRISE

In searching for a less antagonistic approach toward Russia and its reform, it is useful first to examine the work of political philosophers concerning the purpose of government and those factors which promote successful democratic reform.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

Democracy is no panacea. From its beginnings in ancient Greece, scholars have warned against its excesses. Plato did not believe ordinary citizens should have a hand in state affairs as they were not qualified; it should be left to professional “Philosopher-Kings” to rule. His convictions resulted from the trial of his mentor, Socrates, who was sentenced to death by a democratic jury.⁵² Plato’s student Aristotle believed that under ideal conditions, the best type of government was an aristocracy of the nation’s most virtuous citizens.⁵³ Concerning democracy, Aristotle preferred a hybrid of oligarchy and democracy called *politeia*. Politeia was democracy with a set of measures implemented to protect the minority, especially the educated, wealthy class, who had the most to offer society, and likewise the most to lose if the poor, uneducated majority organized against them.⁵⁴

Thus the Greek masters understood that unchecked, democracy can devolve into mob rule. This was manifestly evident in the French Revolution of 1789, where the monarchy was overthrown, but the republic that replaced it very soon devolved into one of the most despotic terrorist regimes in recorded history. In the long run, it set the stage for democratic reform throughout Europe, but in the short-term, it set the conditions for Napoleon’s rise to imperial autocratic power. If not managed properly, democracy can create a chaos which makes autocracy very attractive by comparison. Effective checks and balances are essential.

In the American experience, the founding fathers built on the lessons of history to set up a representative constitutional democracy—a federal republic—with an elaborate system of checks and balances to prevent devolution into mob rule or autocracy. The US system of checks and balances serves to prevent too much power from being wielded by the executive or the legislature. The legislature makes laws and limits the power of the executive. The executive holds veto power over the legislature. The judiciary limits the law-making power of the legislature by interpreting the constitution, protecting the constitutional rights of the minority from the majority, and vice-versa.

In contrast, Russia has a weak system of checks and balances. There is weak accountability of politicians to the electorate, as evidenced by the fact that the President, Prime Minister, and Duma have yet to be chosen in the same way in successive changes of

government. Additionally, the Duma has been incapable of holding the president and ministers accountable.⁵⁵

SECURITY AND THE RULE OF LAW

Throughout the ages, political philosophers such as St Augustine, Luther, Machiavelli, Bodin, and Hobbes, wrote that a government must first provide safety and security, with justice and freedom relegated to secondary concerns.⁵⁶ In an anarchic international system, the state must provide basic security and prosperity or risk its survival, and a democratic government is no exception. Kenneth N. Waltz, in his synthesis of historical thought in political philosophy, “Man, the State, and War,” concludes:

In times of relative quiescence the question men put is likely to be: What good is life without justice and freedom? Better to die than live like a slave. In times of domestic troubles, of hunger and civil war, of pressing insecurity, however, many will ask: Of what use is freedom without a power sufficient to establish and maintain conditions of security? ...If the alternative to tyranny is chaos and if chaos means a war of all against all, then the willingness to endure tyranny becomes understandable. In the absence of order there can be no enjoyment of liberty.⁵⁷

And while justice and freedom may be secondary as basic concerns of people and states, they are by definition essential to achieving “the single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”⁵⁸ Both justice and freedom imply the rule of law as an additional prerequisite to successful democratic reform. Freedom and liberty are often used interchangeably, but the concept of liberty entails those freedoms exercised by the people and supported by their government. Thus whatever liberties a people, or class of people within a society have accrued, the state cannot guarantee those liberties if there is an absence of basic law and order. And as the 17th Century British philosopher Hobbes pointed out, complete freedom cannot be achieved in a secure society—citizens must do without certain liberties if they are to enjoy any freedom at all.⁵⁹

Russia’s current security situation is dire, and the rule of law is virtually absent. Economic collapse, terrorist threats, and organized crime are huge destabilizers. Additionally, Russia has tremendous geopolitical challenges. The Russian federation of today is the vestige of a vast empire, held together historically only by a string of strong-handed totalitarian rulers from the Czars to the communists. Russia does not have a homogeneous culture. It is a patchwork of 21 republics, 49 oblasts, 6 krais and 10 okrugs within the federation, many of which represent ethnic enclaves with aspirations for self-determination, such as the Chechnyan Republic.

Controlling borders and conflict is a huge challenge. While the United States borders two peaceful nations, Russia borders 13, many of which have serious security problems of their own which affect ethnic groups within the Russian Federation. For example, the instability of Georgia's province of Southern Ossetia regularly permeates Russia's Republic of Northern Ossetia. Many of these autonomous regions are taking advantage of the disorder in Russia to challenge Russian sovereignty,⁶⁰ which has grave economic implications for Russia since much of its natural resources, including vast oil reserves, lie in these regions.

Beyond the security issues facing Russian citizens daily, the Russian government itself was almost toppled three times since the reforms began. In 1991, a coup by Soviet hard-liners was unsuccessful in deposing Mikhail Gorbachev and his agenda of reform. In 1993, Boris Yeltsin survived an armed coup, including a tank attack on the Russian Parliament building.⁶¹ And finally, in 1996, the Communists were nearly elected back into power. Only a last-minute alliance between Yeltsin and the oligarchs prevented reversion to a Soviet state. In return for their support, Yeltsin gave seven of the oligarchs the inside track on state divestiture of some natural resources, businesses, and media facilities.⁶² Thus Yeltsin had to compromise democratic and free market reforms to save their framework.

And finally, most Russian officials grew up with the cronyism of the corrupt communist political system. According to Marshall Goldman's analysis, because of this culture, neither the government nor the business sector in Russia respects the rule of law.⁶³

PROSPERITY

In a free society, prosperity aids in establishing the rule of law. Without substantial middle-class wealth, the people do not have a stake in the social order, and will not demand the rule of law in their leaders. "Laws alone, without public pressure to enforce them, will seldom be effective."⁶⁴ Again, Russia's situation is dire. Russia lacks prosperity. The economy has shrunk since the fall of the Soviet Union. Goldman concludes that economic reform in Russia will not progress until an independent middle class develops.⁶⁵

CONSENSUS OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PARTIES

Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister set out one additional criterion for stable democracy: the absence of major anti-democratic political parties.⁶⁶ This factor correlates closely to the others. If a democratic government does not have appropriate checks and balances, and cannot provide adequate security and prosperity for its citizens, the people will seek alternative forms of government.

Russia fails here too. Some of Russia's major political factions are in fact quite anti-democratic, and with the apparent failure of democratic and free-market reforms, these parties are gaining in strength. The government has been so ineffective that half of all Russians believe democracy is not compatible with Russian tradition, according to a 1995 poll.⁶⁷

The Soviet system allowed only one political party, and elections were simply charades to showcase universal support for communism to the rest of the world. With the Communist Party still the only legal party in 1991, the ballot in Soviet Russia's first truly free election was a slate of individuals, without political party affiliation. Based on an aggressive agenda of democratic reform, Boris Yeltsin won a clear victory, getting 60 percent of the national vote in a field of six major candidates.⁶⁸ Political parties developed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its prohibition on dissenting political parties. Worsening economic and security conditions increased support for the anti-democratic parties. Duma elections in 1993 and 1995 showed significant support for the communists and the nationalist parties,⁶⁹ and the communists came close to winning the presidential election of 1996. A victory in the polls by either element could mean the quick termination of Russia's bold democratic experiment.

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

All these shortcomings in Russia's profile for free-market democracy need time to correct—one cannot create a democracy over night. History is full of examples of democratic reform failing for lack of the prerequisite factors outlined above. The French Revolution, discussed earlier, is perhaps the prime example.

REVOLUTIONARY REFORM FAILURES

Russia itself was a fledgling democracy between the February and October revolutions of 1917. The inability of the short-lived Kerensky Republic to maintain security and economic prosperity paved the way for the October revolution with the Bolsheviks seizing power.⁷⁰

After World War I, radical democratic reform was imposed on Germany by the victorious allies. Germany's Weimar Republic existed from 1918 to 1933. The middle class was largely destroyed by the worldwide depression, the economic drain of war reparations dictated by the terms of the armistice, and the French occupation of the Ruhr industrial area in 1923. The economic chaos that ensued set the stage for Hitler's rise to power, restoring apparent security and economic prosperity for most Germans. The stark analogy between the Weimar Republic and Russia today has already been made.^{71,72}

There are many similarities between the Russian situation and that of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Like Russia, Yugoslavia was a federation of republics built along ethnic lines. In

Russia, this federation was held together by the czars, then the communists, through totalitarian rule. In Yugoslavia a succession of rulers—the Ottoman Turks, the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburgs, a brief inter-war authoritarian monarchy dominated by Serbians, and the Cold-War period dictator Marshall Josep Broz Tito—also dealt with internal security turmoil through authoritarian rule. Tito died in 1980, and communist control of the country slowly gave way to ethnic nationalist polarization by the early 1990s. Both Russia and Yugoslavia had modest middle classes, which were soon decimated—in Russia due to poor economic planning and in Yugoslavia due to deliberate severing of the trans-Yugoslavian economic ties that brought a measure of prosperity under Marshall Tito. In Yugoslavia, law and order deteriorated. The result was a series of civil wars as Serbia tried to strengthen the federation and Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia moved towards independence. Writing in 1994, Stevan Pavlowitch echoed the cautions of Plato and Aristotle, decrying “The Barbarity of Tribal Majority Rule.”⁷³ While the breakup along ethnic lines may have been inevitable, he stated that the violence was not, had the West understood the complexity of the situation. His assessment of Yugoslavia is just as relevant to Russia today: “where forty years of communism had prevented both a critical study of the past and a political discussion of the future, there is no political culture. With no understanding of politics, people look for the simplest (and the most dangerous) explanations: conspiracies, love, and hate.”⁷⁴ The ethnic fault lines in the Russian Federation, coupled with the lack of a substantial middle class with a political culture, is likewise leading to a resurgence of nationalism among Russia’s ethnic groups, which could easily result in conflict and Balkanization.

EVOLUTIONARY REFORM SUCCESSES

By contrast to the historical examples of failures in implementing revolutionary reforms, historical and contemporary examples of slower, evolutionary transitions to democracy and free-market economics underscore the need to take it slow.

The American Revolution was not so much a revolution as one step along America’s evolution toward the three pillars enshrined in our National Security Strategy—freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. Unlike the citizens of the French Revolution, the Weimar or Kerensky Republics, Yugoslavia, or contemporary Russia, the American colonists were not starting from scratch. Many of the factors for successful reform were well entrenched in colonial society before the Declaration of Independence. First, there was already a large, prosperous middle class of merchants with a high stake in independence from British taxes. Second, the American colonies, part of the mercantile British Empire, already had a strong tradition of free

enterprise. Third, although the colonists were denied many of the freedoms British subjects enjoyed in England, the British system of parliamentary democratic government was well established by 1776, and part of the culture inherited by the colonists. And finally, the framers of the new republic had studied other democratic societies intensely, and set up an intricate system of checks and balances to prevent abuses. These factors helped ensure the success of the American adoption of more freedom for its citizens, and democratic government without a monarch. And beyond all those positive factors, none of which Russia has, George Washington established the most important norm for the Executive Branch when he declined the overtures of many to grant him autocratic powers in those troubled times.

The former Soviet-block Eastern European states took various paths to reform, and those that chose a less revolutionary pace have outperformed the others. Czechoslovakia was very aggressive, but got ahead of its ability to regulate privatization of government-controlled industry. A risky voucher system for financing privatized industries went awry, derailed by a greedy opportunist who made off with 200 million dollars and set back reform several years.⁷⁵

Poland's program was the most successful for several reasons. First, it managed to resist the collectivization of its farms while under Soviet influence,⁷⁶ and in defiance of the Soviet government had been implementing some other free-market reforms since 1982.⁷⁷ So its agricultural and business sectors already had a modest tradition of free enterprise. Second, there was much internal debate and thought put into just how to privatize effectively. Poland's privatization program was structured from the start to prevent favoritism, corruption, mafia influence, and monopolies from controlling too much. And third, under the leadership of President George H. W. Bush, the United States initially encouraged a slow pace of reform in Poland to avoid chaos.⁷⁸ Resisting later IMF pressure, Poland proceeded deliberately and gradually.⁷⁹ Poland's reform planning is now held up as a model. It was the only former Soviet-block nation to achieve positive GNP growth every year from 1992 to 2000.⁸⁰ Poland's success was all the more remarkable for having concurrently dealt with additional economic pressure from both the European Union and NATO, to meet their membership standards. Poland spent \$15.7 billion to meet NATO standards alone.⁸¹

China is perhaps the best example of evolutionary democratic and free-market reform. China's controlled free-market reform program dates back to 1972, and is slowly creating a large middle class. This middle class is clamoring for more and more democratic reform. Despite the brutal 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, in which up to 500 student demonstrators were killed, this event, ironically, highlights some positive trends. The students demonstrated that there is a popular movement for more democratic reform, growing stronger

as the middle class expands. It also demonstrated that elements of the Chinese Army are sympathetic. President George H. W. Bush's response was basically token sanctions, while maintaining China's Most-Favored-Nation status. He was widely criticized as being too weak in protesting the massacre.^{82,83} Despite this criticism, however, he proceeded to pursue a policy of engagement with China, which he explained in a commencement speech he gave at Yale in 1991. He believed that only continued constructive engagement with China would encourage more free-market reform, and with that increasing wealth would come a stronger foundation for peaceful, democratic reform.⁸⁴ Wisely, as with Poland, he was willing to let reform in China come at an evolutionary pace.

CLOSE CALLS FOR DEMOCRACY

History is also full of examples of existing democratic states being rescued by carefully planned economic assistance—the fostering of prosperity and the development of a large middle class as a way of maintaining stability and preventing social unrest.

America's own experience during the Great Depression is a prime example. Many historians describe the depression as the complete failure of free-market capitalism. Communist and fascist political philosophies were gaining appeal among a growing number of impoverished Americans. President Roosevelt dealt with the instability by shoring up the middle class, establishing various forms of government economic assistance via the New Deal.⁸⁵

Likewise in Europe at the end of World War II, a prime motivation for the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan was to encourage European economic recovery and political reform so as to protect Europe from Communist domination. Communists were agitating in Greece and Turkey in 1947, and were postured to win pending elections in Italy in 1948.⁸⁶ Creating a prosperous middle class was seen as a key strategy in preventing communist subversion. Historians credit the massive economic assistance of the Marshall Plan, coupled with the US security umbrella which allowed Europe to concentrate on economic recovery vice military defense, as having deterred Soviet expansion in Western Europe.⁸⁷ A Report to the National Security Council, NSC-68, in 1950, made the development of worldwide economic prosperity a key element of American Cold War strategy, a hedge against communist ideology taking hold among the impoverished masses yearning for basic security and prosperity.⁸⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus Russia has taken on an accelerated program of reform without the prerequisites necessary for success. History has shown that without these essential ingredients, reform is doomed to failure. Russia lacks proper checks and balances in government. It lacks basic

security, threatened by anti-democratic political parties, mafia, and terrorists. It lacks cultural respect for law and order due to a legacy of corruption in government and industry. It lacks a large prosperous middle class, and it has large opposition political parties that are anti-democratic.

Russia's challenges are greater than anything the United States ever faced in building and sustaining democracy. Yet Russia's success in implementing reform is absolutely vital to US national interests. If the democratic reformers are unsuccessful, reversion to communist or nationalist government would be an international catastrophe. It could mean a return to Cold-War style competition, nuclear saber-rattling, and hostile or hegemonic relationships with its now-democratic neighbors. Or, worse, Russia could become the world's largest failed state—a Somalia with weapons of mass destruction. It is imperative that Russian reform succeed, and to ensure that success, the United States should adopt a new, constructive policy toward Russia, as follows.

- Revise the National Security Strategy to remove any antagonistic language about a US/Russia relationship of distrust. US policymakers need to quit viewing Russia as the traditional enemy, and focus on mutual interests, such as fighting transnational terrorism, and making democracy work.
- Encourage the reforms of President Putin, as interim measures to provide security by combating terrorism and the mafia, ensuring positive control of weapons of mass destruction, and growing credible government institutions with proper checks and balances to mitigate corruption.
- Foster a closer bi-lateral military alliance with Russia, in addition to the multi-lateral Partnership for Peace, to assist its military in achieving an increased state of readiness to protect its borders, become partners in fighting trans-national terrorism, and guaranteeing the control of its weapons of mass destruction.
- Help Russia grow a large, prosperous, multi-ethnic middle class, through Marshall-Plan style economic aid if necessary. Initial US assistance or aid could take the form of helping Russia bust up the monopolies built by the oligarchs, establishing a Securities and Exchange Commission to regulate and protect investors, and restoring the value of pension plans lost during the rampant inflation of the 1990s. In essence, this is similar to the approach the United States is taking with Iraq today, providing a massive infusion of economic aid to ensure a successful transition to democracy. The investment in Russia

should be considered much less risky though, because Russian leadership has demonstrated a strong desire to reform, initiated from within.

- Once the middle class has been established, assist Russia in instituting full democratic reform.
- Once the economic development and reform are complete, push for Russia NATO membership.
- Finally, the United States should learn from the experiences of reform in China and Russia, and form similar strategies for averting economic disaster and regional instability when inevitable reform comes to North Korea, Cuba, and Iran.

CONCLUSION

US/Russia relations have deteriorated since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Much of the antagonism between the two countries has come from US criticism of Russian policies. While some of this criticism was justified by US national interests—the security of nuclear weapons, arms sales, and nuclear assistance to Iran—much was the result of US insensitivity to the Russian situation and impatience with the pace of Russian reform.

The Russian people, under the progressive leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and Vladimir Putin, have demonstrated a bold, brave commitment to freedom, democracy and free enterprise, despite lacking the essential ingredients for successful reform. History shows that without these essential ingredients, Russia's chances of succeeding in this endeavor are not good.

History also shows that people need security, both physical and economic, before the luxury of democratic civil liberties. A prosperous middle class, with a stake in a free-market social order, both facilitates democratic reform in autocratic societies and works against reversion to authoritarian rule in democratic societies. President George H. W. Bush understood this, as demonstrated in his policies encouraging evolutionary, vice revolutionary, economic reform in both Poland and China.

Russia's success in implementing reform is vital to US national interests. This paper recommends a new, constructive policy to encourage slower, deliberately planned, evolutionary reform in Russia, focusing on internal security first, then prosperity, then full democratic reform. Without such a measured approach, Russia will surely remain on the brink. Thrice since 1989, it has survived a reversion to authoritarian rule. Russia could very soon find itself in the same situation as Spain in 1936, with a grim choice between communist victory at the polls or nationalist dictatorship, and the real possibility of civil war.

In short the United States should revisit the original intent of President George H. W. Bush: "It's time to build on our new relationship with [Russia], to endorse and encourage a peaceful process of internal change toward democracy and economic opportunity."⁸⁹ And as contrary as it may be to our national character, we should be very patient in waiting for Russia to get there.

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